



"Flight" photograph

Some of the original members of the Gosport School of Special Flying gathered for the Brooklands re-union last Saturday. In the centre, distinguished by a beard and a glass of milk, is Col. R. R. Smith-Barry, founder of the Gosport school in 1917. On the left, in front of Air Comdre. Pulford, is Capt. Duncan Davis, who was host of the party, and beyond him, all but hidden, is the new Director of Technical Development, Air Comdre. Roderic Hill.

GOSPORT RE-UNION

BEHIND the history of the first Brooklands "Gosport Reunion" last Saturday lies a story of some interest. When, in 1917, the School of Special Flying was formed at Fort Grange Aerodrome, Gosport, the moving spirit behind the organisation was Colonel R. R. Smith-Barry, A.F.C.

When the School commenced operations, one of the first officers to take the course and be graded "A1 at Gosport" was Capt. H. Duncan Davis, A.F.C., who, after having received this category, was appointed Wing Examining Officer to the 34th Wing, R.F.C.

A third personality comes into the narrative in the person of a boy of some sixteen years who was at school in Southsea. In the Christmas Holidays of 1917 he and a number of other school O.T.C. members spent their leave in the "Headquarters Flight," where they helped (or, very possibly, hindered) with the repair of machines which had met with mishaps. His name was C. Nepean Bishop, and he is now a member of the Brooklands Flying Club, the managing director of which is, of course, Capt. Davis. Col. Smith-Barry is a private-owner member of the same club.

The idea of having a reunion at Brooklands came to Mr. Bishop some two months back, when it occurred to him that it would be twenty-one years in July since the School first started. That being so, it followed that the British flying training system of to-day came of age in July also.

And so the reunion came to pass. Enthusiastically aided by Col. Smith-Barry, Capt. Davis managed to trace a number of the old Gosportians, and on Saturday last they foregathered at the Brooklands Flying Club premises. There were 24 "veterans" present.

Before dinner, Colonel Smith-Barry persuaded Major Cloute into his—the Colonel's—Puss Moth and proceeded to show that his hand had lost none of its cunning. This flight was one of the higher spots of the evening, the Puss Moth assuming at intervals some incredible positions. Next Mr. S. Milner Deighton, who had not flown for some 20 years, was "ordered" into the front seat, whilst the Colonel sat in the back—with the dual control in. And Deighton flew it as if he had only been out of the air a few weeks—except for his turns,

in which he skidded outwards. Asking, as he would of old, what he was doing wrong, as there was such a rush of wind on his cheek, Mr. Deighton was mildly surprised when told to "Shut the — window!"

Dinner was then served in the Club restaurant, which had been made up as far as possible to represent the old Fort Grange Mess. After Colonel Smith-Barry, who was in the chair, had given the toast of The King, Capt. Duncan Davis said how honoured he was, as one of the earliest S.S.F. pupils, to have been successful in organising this reunion at Brooklands. He remarked that the success of the Gosport system was due to the foresight of Col. Smith-Barry, Col. Phillipi, Mr. O. W. E. Manning and others, and pointed out that the present Central Flying School method differed very little from that prepared by Col. Smith-Barry in 1917. He said that at that time it was his own ambition to run a "civil Gosport," and in 1927—ten years after—he got his chance and started the Brooklands School of Flying.

12,000 Miles to a Party

Maj. Norman Brearley, D.S.O., who commanded B Flight, said that he thought that this 21st anniversary meeting should not be allowed to pass without someone telling the assembled guests precisely how the School of Special Flying came into being. He had come some 12,000 miles to attend the party; he would like to hear about the commencement of the Gosport School.

Capt. S. Milner Deighton, Commander of A Flight in 1918, recalled how he used to quail at the fierce look in "S.B.'s" eye—a look which he noticed could still be produced if required.

Colonel G. Phillipi talked of the fights with the "powers that were" over the starting of the Gosport School. He had jumped at the chance of becoming an instructor, and was proud that his first pupil had been Capt. Williams, later Commander of C Flight. Six months after the start, all his pupils flew much better than he did, and he well remembered the occasion when Sir John Salmond came down, a fortnight after the school started, and saw 12 *ab initio* pupils fly in formation, loop, spin and land intact, after only 14 days' tuition!

Speaking of to-day's methods in the R.A.F., Col. Phillipi said there were far too many restrictions. These destroyed initiative in pilots, and he thought that if many of them were removed we should have an even better R.A.F.

Colonel Smith-Barry endorsed Col. Phillipi's remarks, recalling the help which he had from Sir John Salmond, who enabled him to get the pick of pilots posted back from France to start the school. He himself had actually done a year's instruction after a crash in 1914, after which he was given command of No. 60 Squadron overseas. It was then he found how badly trained were the pilots sent to France, and he voiced his opinion so loudly and long that he was at length allowed to start the school. He disclaimed being really responsible for the present system, saying that he had only done the "donkey-work." In other words, he had written the alphabet, whilst others had produced the classical works. His system was based on as few rules as possible. For instance, if there was a post on the edge of the aerodrome it was no use making a rule that it must be avoided when taking off or landing. It naturally would be.

Capt. F. P. Scott told how he took the system to Chile, whilst Wing Cdr. Pulford said that the present R.A.F.V.R. training sequence was essentially "Gosport," and other speakers were Mr. F. Dudley Hobbs, author of *How to fly and instruct on an Avro*, Capt. J. N. Dundas Heenan and Mr. C. G. Grey.

Mr. B. S. Smallman, secretary of the Brooklands Flying Club then presented Colonel Smith-Barry with a model of Clerget-Avro B.3157. This was the first machine that "S. B." and Capt. Heenan converted to take the Clerget engine in place of the Monosoupape Gnome, and in 1917 it caused something of a sensation.

Among those present at the reunion were:—

Air Comdre. Pulford, Maj. Norman Brearley, E. E. Stammers, Sgt. Wilnot (who was Col. Smith-Barry's personal mechanic), F. Dudley Hobbs, Col. G. Phillipi, R. H. Upson, Capt. D. Ayre, Rodwell Banks, O. W. A. Manning, Wing Cdr. H. A. Hamersley, T. Westbrook, Capt. F. P. Scott, Wing Cdr. Vincent, Capt. J. N. Dundas Heenan, R. E. H. Heenan, Flt. Sgt. Marwick, Air Comdre Roderic Hill, Maj. Gilchrist, S. P. Bousfield, Capt. D. Milner Deighton, Maj. Cloute, and, of course, Col. Smith-Barry and Capt. Duncan Davis.